

# Thomas Foods will be back bigger than ever

- Sharon Hansen

## Local News



Thomas Foods International has announced it will build an abattoir facility at a new site about eight kilometres from the old site in Murray Bridge, along Mannum Road.

On Thursday, the company announced that building and construction would start as soon as it was possible and it was hoped initial production at the new site would commence as early as November 2020.

About 2000 jobs would be created when the new plant was fully operational, with about 400 jobs required in the initial start up of production.

The state-of-the-art new facility will be built after a fire destroyed a large amount of the established plant in January 2018.

Thomas Foods chief executive officer Darren Thomas confirmed the new facility would be constructed just outside of Murray Bridge at a cost several hundred million dollars.

He said the company had various options for relocation in South Australia but stood firm on its promise.

"From day one, we committed to rebuilding our Murray Bridge operations," Mr Thomas said.

Rather than lament what was lost, we've chosen to focus on emerging bigger, better and stronger.

We've chosen to focus on the exciting future for our company and the community of Murray Bridge."



Darren Thomas

He said the company planned to build one of the world's the most advanced multi-species processing facilities.

"We want our facility to be world-class in adapting the latest advancements in technology, efficiency, environmental sustainability, animal welfare and workplace safety.

It's also our long-term commitment to our community, staff, customers and livestock suppliers throughout South Australia and Australia."

Mr Thomas said that after the fire the people who had been doing it tough were the company's employees.

"Thanks to all the people that helped us but most importantly to our employees who stood by us," he said.

As you know from day one many lives were turned upside down, but in January (after the fire) we were able to create more employment at Lobethal and were able to redeploy all but about 70 people ... out of a workforce of 1500 which was an amazing effort by our company.

## **Creating more opportunities**

Rural City of Murray Bridge Mayor Brenton Lewis said the announcement would help bring other companies into the Murraylands.

"This announcement shows we can attract companies into the region - we have many players, of which Thomas Foods is a major player already, but this will lead to other opportunities," he said.

"It will give our economy extra strength and give hope to the suppliers, workforce and the community."

Mr Lewis said funding from the state and federal governments would deliver new infrastructure for the facility which could be used to attract other possibilities.

"This move gives us more industrial opportunities now that there will be solid infrastructure, it will be another precinct which can be grown," he said.

Mr Lewis also praised the company and the Thomas family for its decision to stay in Murray Bridge.

## **Regional boost**

Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland chief executive Jo Podoliak said the announcement had brought a huge amount of confidence and relief to the business, industry and wider community.

"From here, we can expect to see significant regional growth in our exports, a boost for local producers and not to mention the significant regional infrastructure investment (and follow on effects from this)," she said.

"It also reiterates our region's place as the food production and manufacturing mecca for South Australia.

"We expect to see confidence as this collaborative investment sends an exceptionally positive investment message to any companies considering putting money or resources in the Murraylands."

RDA Murraylands stated the addition of 2000 jobs would have an enormous effect on the region.

Estimates show the results would be:

- to create an additional 4,800 jobs in other related intermediate industries across the region, State and Australian economy.
- Increase output to the local economy of \$1 billion p/a.
- Total output for South Australia would be estimated at \$1.150 billion.

We're excited to see the cutting edge technology that comes with the new facility, and the higher level of skilled jobs required to see it come to fruition," Ms Podoliak said.

"There will be huge ripple effects on our community's economies because of this."

## **Great for the state**

South Australian Premier Steven Marshall welcomed news of the new build and praised the company's commitment to the state and to Murray Bridge.

"This is great news, great for livestock producers, great for exports, great for regional jobs and its great for our State," he said.

"The state and federal governments have worked diligently together to make sure this dream from January last year became a reality.

Mr Marshall said the combined government funding, which totalled \$24 million, was money to be used to create infrastructure such as new roads.